

DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONS

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DOC, Offenders Give Generously to G.R.A.C.E. Camp *Offenders' Children Get Safe, Nurturing Outdoors Experience*

(Baton Rouge) Growing up with a mother or father behind bars can be a very difficult experience for a child. Providing loving, nurturing experiences for such children is the goal of G.R.A.C.E. (God's Really Awesome Camping Experience) camp. The non-denominational effort is spearheaded by United Methodist Churches of Louisiana and depends on the generosity of other churches and individuals who desire to give these at-risk children a week of fun and positive reinforcement they may not otherwise experience.

The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Corrections Services presented a check in the amount of \$3,875 to G.R.A.C.E. Camp Chairman Reverend John Johns and his wife, Peggy, during the monthly Warden's meeting held August 19th, 2004. The amount represents monies collected from employees and offenders at several DOC institutions, including Headquarters and Office of Youth Services. Especially impressive was the total donated from the Louisiana Correction Institute for Women – various inmate organizations and employees gave more than \$3200 dollars to G.R.A.C.E. camp. Other institutions donated money and supplies directly to the various camps prior to the check presentation.

"G.R.A.C.E. camp provides such a great opportunity to reach children with incarcerated parents," explained Secretary Richard L. Stalder. "The Department has made this

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initiative one of its most important early intervention efforts in our fight to reverse the state's high incarceration and recidivism rates. Nothing we do right now is more important than making sure these children have every opportunity to grow up with sound moral and educational values that will help them make good choices later in life and avoid the destructive cycle of crime and incarceration."

There are three camp locations across the state that serve 9 to 11 year olds. The fourth camp serves those 13 and older who have been with G.R.A.C.E. camp for a few years. The weeklong experience helps children to overcome the stigma associated with having a parent in prison and to begin to appreciate themselves for the people they are. Many of the camp activities are focused on helping to build self-esteem, finding individual talents and gifts, and learning to work successfully in groups by building social skills.

The camps are free to children and their families and rely strictly on donations. For more information on G.R.A.C.E. camp or to find out how you can help with donations, please email Camp Directors Reverend Lorris and Becky Wimberly at gracecamp@spiritministries.org.

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